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Page 7

THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2016

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Page 22

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# INPORT NEWS

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## Getting their kicks



MICHELLE ALLENBORG/ POSTMEDIA NETWORK  
Port Colborne High School student Cody McAllister, left, takes a shot at the goals during a fun soccer game against St. Catharines Collegiate High School on May 24 in Port Colborne. See story Page 3.

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# UPFRONT

# It's on like Comic Con

JOHN LAW  
Postmedia Network

Fanz will be in the house. So will Mini-Me, the Hulk and Johnny Drama. They're all part of the city's biggest pop culture bash, taking over Scotiabank Convention Centre this weekend.

And for Chris Dabrowski, co-organizer and co-founder of the Niagara Falls Comic Con, it never feels like work.

Even when it's a massive amount of work.

"For the event to be successful, you have to be a fan at heart," he says. "It's a lot of hard work, but it's fun work."

"You get caught up in the moment, you have as much fun seeing a fan meeting their favourite celebrity for the first time at a table ... just to see the smile on their face. It's rewarding."

He knows the feeling. Dabrowski used to mail autograph requests to celebrities as a kid, eagerly awaiting the mail each day to see if his efforts paid off. Many times it did. His mother, Andy Rooney, who sent back the young Dabrowski's request with "No, Andy Rooney."

Years later when he booked Ken Osmond — Eddie Haskell from *Leave It to Beaver* — for the Hamilton Comic Con, he noticed he was signing the same photo he sent back to Dabrowski 25 years earlier.



Fans pack Scotiabank Convention Centre for Day 2 of last year's Niagara Falls Comic Con.

Every Comic Con has moments like this for Dabrowski, when he isn't running around fixing a hundred- or so little emergencies that happen with an event this big. One that is recognizable from the modest show it started out on Clifton Hill.

The first year, the Comic Con was held at Dave & Buster's with seven vendors. The biggest celebrity was former WWE star 'Leapin' Lanny Poffo. It moved to Sco-

tiabank Convention Centre the following year and instantly became one of the new venue's biggest events. By 2013, it was utilizing the entire convention centre floor and attracted 15,000 people. It grew to 20,000 in 2014 and 23,000 last year.

Dabrowski anticipates 28,000 people this year, and with it the jammed hotels, restaurants and attractions that come with a successful Comic Con. He can gauge the impact

by how backed up Highway 420 is on the Friday evening opens.

It benefits the Falls. But he acknowledges the Falls also gains benefit the Con. Some celebrities are swayed to come because of the Falls factor, making it a weekend trip with their family.

"We're lucky that we're here in Niagara Falls, we really are," he says. "There are different (Comic Con) popping up in cities like London, Ont., ...

Windsor has one ... but not all are successful."

This year's celebrity lineup includes Henry Winkler, wrestling legend Shawn Michaels, Star Trek's William Shatner and stars of *Arrow*'s Stephen Amell.

The comic book contingent includes former *Canada's Next Top Model* Chris Clement, Archie artist Dan Parent and Marvel painter Joe Jusko.

There will be dozens of Q&A panels and information sessions with fans, along

## WANT TO GO?

What: Niagara Falls Comic Con

Where: Scotiabank Convention Centre, 6815 Stanley Ave., Niagara Falls

When: Friday to Sunday

Tickets: Friday \$25, Saturday \$40, Sunday \$35. Three-day pass \$80. [www.niagarafallscomiccon.com](http://www.niagarafallscomiccon.com)

with more than 100 vendors and exhibitors. Additions this year include the Canadian debut of Jaws: The Movie Prop Exhibit, a re-creation of the 1975 *Star Trek* by Toronto artists Sarah Kennedy and Joe Clement.

Cars will include the General Lee (*The Dukes of Hazzard*), the Batmobile and the Gran Torino from *Starsky & Hutch*.

Saturday night, there will be a separate admission event with a live podcast by Kevin Smith and Jason Mewes.

"We improve year to year," says Dabrowski, who runs the show with co-organizer Jason Ponce. "With more people, logically, there's more work involved. This'll be our fifth year at the Scotiabank Convention Centre, and we've fig-

ured out most of it."

[jlaw@postmedia.com](mailto:jlaw@postmedia.com)

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# LOCAL NEWS

# Special game a big score

**MICHELLE ALLENBERG**  
Postmedia Network

Special needs students ready for kick-off

Port Colborne High School on May 24 hosted its first ever special needs soccer tournament.

The fun games were a chance for students from different schools in Niagara to meet one another and get active.

"It was just kind of an event where it was like 'let's try it,'" said Erin Bokma, organizer and gym teacher at Port High.

Disabled students participated in a variety of sports tournaments, including for basketball and volleyball. Bokma said she wanted the students to enjoy a summer activity and thought what better way than soccer.

"Soccer is easy. It's easy for the special needs kids and the rules you can modify easily. You can use all different ball sizes, you can have as many helpers on the field as you need. All around it is an easy kind of sport for the kids to grasp," Bokma said.

When organizing the tournament Bokma said she sent out an e-mail to other District School Board of Niagara schools to see if anyone would be interested. Bokma ended up having a good response with 10 high schools from Port Colborne, Thorold, Fort Erie and St. Catharines interested. There were about 200 students taking turns playing in Tuesday's tournament.

Valerie Taylor, program leader for Schools to Commu-



Port Colborne High School student Grant Flagg, right, keeps control of the ball during a fun soccer game for Niagara's special needs students at Port Colborne High School.

nity at St. Catharines College said she thought the idea was great. She said the event gave students the chance to make new friends at other schools and catch up with friends they already have.

Encouraging healthy living

was also a selling point for the tournament.

Taylor said having students active and out in the sun getting some Vitamin D is great.

"It's good for anybody ... They are pretty excited to be here. They like the opportu-

nity to be outside and a lot of them have friends in other schools, so they enjoy it," Taylor said.

Port Colborne High School student Grant Flagg, 17, said he enjoyed playing soccer and hanging out with his friends.

He said he normally doesn't play soccer, but because he runs track he found soccer easy.

Bokma said the importance of the tournament was to get the students out and having fun. Special needs or not,

she said it's imperative to get youth active.

Bokma said the tournament was a success and hopes the school will continue running it in the future.

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# I've been thinking: Judge Not?

PASTOR GARY TOMICUCH

Wainfleet Congregational Christian Church

**D**o not judge, or you to will be judged." (Matthew 7:1)

The Christian and the unbeliever have a field day with this one. "JUDGE NOT", who do you think you are to judge me? or walk a mile in my shoes? Now compare Mathew 7:1 with 1 Corinthians 5:12. "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?"

The contrast is apparent, the former passage says "Do not judge" the latter says "you are to judge". Is this an appropriate contradiction? Here's the tension is easily resolved. In the context it is always king. It is not that Christians are never to judge, they are commanded to judge immoral behavior within the church. Sin like leaven can spread through the whole loaf and like leprosy, if not dealt with it will affect many others.

The whole context in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 is the command to expel that immoral brother who is having sexual relations with his own stepmother which in turn was a form of incest. But even this severe judgement was tempered by Grace. In 1 Corinthians 5:5 it says "hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit

saved on the day of the Lord"

Simply put, the people in the church are held to a much higher standard where as God alone takes the prerogative upon Himself in judging those outside the church. (1 Cor. 5:13)

For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through His Son. (John 3:17)

Let there be no doubt Christians are to judge one another, the question is how are they to judge? The answer is found in Matthew 7:2 "For in the same way you judge others...you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

We are sinners and often to eager to point a finger at others and fail to realize that three fingers are pointing back at us. Matthew 7:5 warns us "You hypocrite first take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brothers eye".

With some justification Christians are often viewed as hypocrites, prideful, judgmental, and judgmental. We are too quick to judge others and fail to realize as the Pharisees did before us ... He is that without sin, let him cast the first stone.

Does that mean we make light of sin? No we should hate it with every fiber of our beings - Christ went to the cross because of it. And Christ alone being without sin was the

only one who could have condemned and stoned that women taken in adultery. Yet in equal measure He said "Neither do I condemn you - go and sin no more."

The Lord went to parties and hung out with the tax collectors, prostitutes and other people of ill repute. He came for sinners, He came to save it and save them. He knew the sick needed to be healed and He did that doctor. He forgave that women who sinned much, cried much and was forgiven much.

Christians need to learn to follow the example of Christ (not accepting sin in the Church) but Le the money changers in the temple on the one hand and being all to eager to throw stones on the other hand. We sometimes reverse these things. Why are we to judge Christians? because Christ said so. How are we to judge? Like Jesus did with firmness tempered by Grace. If anyone is caught in a sin those who are spiritual should restore him gently. This is analogous to repairing, mending or a broken bone. If repairing, mending or a broken bone lets that Christians are guilty of these three sins: judgement, hypocrisy and homophobe lets not give ammunition to that charge.

Judgement and hypocrisy fall under Romans 2:1 and 2 "When you saw the wicked should be punished, you are condemning yourself for you do these very same things."

Only God has the supreme authority and He will exercise it to judge Christians according to their works and unbelievers for rejecting God's Son, therefore negating any possible hope for their salvation.

The last group (homosexuals) — are not to be treated harshly with judgmentism not with slogans of hatred nor waving signs that God hates you. Many Christians think that Gandhi said of Christians "I like your Jesus, but your followers are so much unlike Him."

Even the LGBTs, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender, and their lifestyles while not pleasing to God are nonetheless not the unpardonable sins. We can't single any sins out by elevating what we deem to be offensive to God realizing that ALL SIN is repulsive to Him and militates against His holiness.

There is forgiveness for all who repent in sincerity, allowing the Holy Spirit to change them from the inside out.

"As this amazing promise assures us "Neither the nor the nor homosexuals, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor gluttons, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (warning). And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God." (promise) 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

## Mediocrity and the council of Niagara region



GRANT  
LAFRENIERE

Councillors moved agenda items around, pushed public delegations further and further into the undiscovered country that exists beyond council's 11 p.m. curfew, and apparently were in competition to see who could shout "point of order" the most times.

Finally, after some 45 minutes of this — and keep in mind, this is regional business had got underway — St. Catharines Coun. Tim Righy said the most honest thing I have heard from a regional politician all year.

"With all due respect," Righy said, "I think we're looking like a bunch of jerks."

As I watched this procedural gong-show, a passage from Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* began to echo in my mind. It is, with the smallest modification and apology to Mr. Heller, a perfect

### description of this council:

"Some government councils have mediocrity, some councils achieve mediocrity and some councils have mediocrity thrust upon them. With Niagara regional council it is all three. Even among councils lacking this distinction, this council stands out as lacking more distinction than all the rest, and people who watch it are always impressed by how unimpressive it is."

Just to rub some salt into the public wound, when councillors finally agreed to get down to business they immediately went into a closed session.

They returned after nearly an hour to publicly pass a motion requesting the OPP or RCMP investigate the Burgoyne Bridge reconstruction project. The exact nature of the allegations have not been disclosed to the public.

While one can argue some details should not be disclosed pending a possible police probe, asking for an investigation is an extraordinary development. Council can and must provide some information to the public about the nature of the allegations.

Eight minutes later, council was back behind

closed doors to hear from outgoing CAO Harry Schlange. You may recall that when Schlange resigned his post to take a job in hampton, his replacement was never named and he resigned as problems with council's leadership so egregious it is impossible for him to continue on with the Region.

We don't know what these issues are because the entirety of the discussion was behind closed doors. We don't know if council takes Schlange's concerns seriously, and if they do, how those issues will be remedied.

Council could have if restored a degree of lost public confidence if had even the tiniest film of courage and addressed Schlange's concerns openly. Instead, we were treated to a tiresome debate about procedure.

The only benefit of council behaving like a bunch of jerks is that St. Catharines Coun. Andy Petrowski refrained from the meeting before his asinine motion to be excused from June's month-long random seating reassignment could be heard.

This may be considered a cold comfort given the sad mockery of a meeting, but at this stage, we have to take what we can get.

It is a rare thing to hear frank honesty among politicians, particularly at Niagara Region where many members apparently look in the mirror and do not see their own reflections, but that of Frank Underwood staring back at them.

We can say many things about council's members, but claiming they lack of variety is not one of them.

Too many regional councillors are too interested in what they imagine to be impressive power plays and self political manoeuvring. In reality, they perform their sideshow with all the smooth subtlety of a drunken walrus and the august majesty of a flea circus.

So, as I say, unvarnished honesty among this group is as rare a thing as a virgin in Vegas.

But rare doesn't mean non-existent.

So it was on Thursday night that such a glimmer of truth was seen after an exhausting squabble over who could speak when, how and about what.

At one point, councillors began arguing about whether or not the precise language of a bylaw permitted a member of the public to provide a presentation or briefing to council.

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# A giant leap made for Parkinson's

MICHELLE ALLENBERG  
Postmedia Network

Sunday, May 22, Parkinson Canada took to the sky to raise money and awareness for Parkinson's disease.

Two brave souls geared up at Skydive Burnaby in Bellevue Beach to throw themselves out a plane. Jason Stanton, 30, and Alejandro Alas, 27, who raised money for the cause, were excited to participate in the Life Lists Challenge.

Jon Collins, events and partnerships with Parkinson Canada, said he hopes the challenge will reach people who want to do something good, but will also have an epic experience.

Participants of the challenge had a choice of skydiving, bungee jumping, zip lining, to name a few. People were encouraged to choose an activity to check off their own life list and do it for a positive reason.

Amanda Stanton of Parkinson Canada said it is the first time the organization has run the challenge. Staff hope to run another set of events for life lists in the future.

The idea behind the event is: life lists instead of bucket lists.

She said the organization likes to steer away from bucket lists because people should focus more on living and what they can accomplish now.

"There are challenges that you can do with Parkinson's disease that's not able to do because you know the loss of mobility or what not," she said.

The goal for participants was to raise funds for Parkinson's research. Jason Stanton raised more than \$1,000 for Parkinson Canada.

He said he was interested in the organization since his wife Amanda works for the charity. He was also touched by the stories of people who suffer from Parkinson's disease every day.

"I chose this guy named Jamie whose story really related to mine. He's a father, he has a couple kids, and he is only a few years older than I am. His story really resonated with me," he said, referring to a section on the Life Lists Challenge website where people with Parkinson's disease can share their stories. When Stanton read some of the stories he felt the need to contribute in any way he could.

He said there are no plans for him to meet Jamie, whose story affected him, but he said it would be great if he could.

He chose skydiving because it's something he has always wanted to do. When he was growing up his father flew small planes, so he's always been interested in flying and skydiving.

"It's been something that has always been on my bucket list — it's been something I've always wanted to do. So, I thought why not do it for such a great cause and try to raise as much money as I can ... and it looks like it will be a lot of

fun," Stanton said as he stood near the skydiving drop zone watching jumpers make safe landings.

As for Alas raising money for Parkinson's disease is something that is a part of who he is. Alas said he doesn't know anyone with the disease, but he has friends who have family members with it. Alas said for him it is also important to give back to the community, no matter what the cause is.

"I'm glad I got the opportunity to give back to the community in such a manner. I'm excited to make sure I raise awareness for how Parkinson's disease affects lives in many forms," Alas said.

Alas was able to raise more than \$1,000 for the cause he hopes to continue supporting in the future.

Skydiving is an extreme sport and Alas said by participating he is living his life to the fullest. Since learning about the effects of Parkinson's disease, Alas said he feels people need to try to do as much as they can in life.

"Skydiving lets you feel alive. I'm excited," he said before prepping for his jump.

Parkinson's disease is a degenerative disease that affects the way you move. People who are affected by Parkinson's disease may have a tremor which affects their hands, arms, or legs. They can also suffer from stiff muscles, slow movement and problems with balance or walking.

For more information about Parkinson's disease and the Life Lists Challenge visit [www.life-listschallenge.ca](http://www.life-listschallenge.ca).

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## NIAGARA 2041

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The Municipal Comprehensive Review will look at the land we have available across Niagara, and will ensure we have enough to sustain our expected growth to the year 2041. It will also examine how that land is distributed throughout Niagara.



#### HOW WE FLOW:

The Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan will ensure Niagara has the infrastructure to provide critical water and wastewater services to our growing region in a sustainable and financially responsible way.



#### HOW WE GO:

The Transportation Master Plan will look at how we currently travel in and around Niagara and how we can improve our transportation systems, including options for walking, cycling and public transit, to better serve Niagara's future needs.

#### GET INVOLVED:

Residents are invited to attend a Public Information Centre in their community to learn how each of these projects contribute to Niagara's overall growth plan for the next 25 years, and how you can have your voice heard.

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**June 22, 2016**

City of Welland  
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There is an opportunity at any time during this process for interested persons to bring comments and concerns to the attention of the project managers, and to review outstanding issues. If you have any questions or comments or wish to be added to the study mailing list, please contact us:

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If you are unable to attend, or would like more information, please go to the project website <https://www.niagararegion.ca/2041>.

The Transportation and Water and Wastewater studies follow the Master Plan process as outlined in Section A.2.7 of the Municipal Engineers Association (MEA) Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (Oct. 2000, as amended in 2007 and 2011). The Master Plan will be filed under Approach #2 of the MEA Class EA Approach for Master Planning. The Master Servicing Plan will satisfy the planning requirements for Schedule A, A+ and select Schedule B projects and provide the basis for future investigations of identified Schedule B and C projects.



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# LOCAL NEWS

## Shop sown from cannabis seeds

Change is coming. And Justin Rotella plans to be ready to embrace that "big change" when it comes.

The Port Colborne native who recently opened the doors of Rose City Seeds can't dispense marijuana at his 405 East Main St. business; however, he said current legislation does not prevent him from selling seeds.

And his shop is stocked full of a large assortment of seeds from all over the world, allowing his customers to grow a variety of cannabis plants.

"It's all legit. These are all



ALLAN BENNER

cannabis seeds for medical patients," he said.

Purchasing and growing seeds within limits is legally permitted in Canada for medical users, who submit required documentation to the federal government for approval.

"But in the end, if you're 19 (years old) or older, pretty soon the law's going to change. You're going to be

able to grow."

New legislation regarding marijuana is expected to be in place by the spring of 2017. When that happens, Rotella hopes being at the root of the seed-selling business will put him an ideal position to expand.

"You have to start somewhere and the seed business is going to be one of the best businesses, I think, when the time comes."

"When everyone wants to start to grow, they're going to go to the seed banks," he said. "They have to go where they have to go to grow, you know what I mean."

When the federal gov-

ernment starts licensing businesses to dispense marijuana, Rotella expects companies that are currently involved in the industry will be first in line to be awarded those licences.

"I'm basically waiting for that, so Rose City Seeds will become Rose City Weeds," he said. "But until then, it's seeds."

Rotella said he's providing a service to people who are relying on marijuana for treatment of chronic pain and other ailments.

He said customers bring him their prescriptions and he's then able to help them select plants that will best treat their symptoms. Whether customers have back pain or headaches, he said, "there's so much different stuff that can address all of that."

Rotella said he is a medical marijuana patient himself, using five grams of the drug daily to combat his insomnia, and it helps him better



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Justin Rotella has opened Rose City Seeds, providing seeds for cannabis plants at the East Main Street business.

than pharmaceutical remedies he's tried in the past.

Although physicians write prescriptions for marijuana, he said there's no one available to direct people on what type of plants they need, at least not in Welland.

"We're here to let people know that this is what will be available and you have no idea how much it can change your life to get off pharmaceuticals."

Although a packet of a few seeds can cost \$70 to \$110

at Rotella's shop, he said the plant that grows from those seeds can last users for years.

And in some cases, the plants can be harvested in as little as about eight weeks.

"This is going to be a really big change and I'm really anxious to see what's going to happen," he said.

More information is available by calling 289-241-7787.

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# Footwear-filching foxes put boots to boredom

ALLAN BENNER  
Postmedia Network

At first Cal Peyton thought a neighbour's dog had swiped the shoe and carried it off when he found it among the flowers in the garden of his home on Tennessee Avenue in Port Colborne.

But when he and wife Lena asked around, they quickly learned that it was not an isolated incident.

Lost shoes and boots have been turning up all over the Port Colborne lakefront subdivision, taken from backyard decks and porches.

The culprits? A growing family of mischievous foxes.

"It's the pups," Lena said. "Mom goes hunting, and the pups play. They play like kids."

"The last couple of weeks, it's been constant. Everyone knows now, no shoes outside. No one leaves their shoes out right now because for sure they're going missing. They have a penchant for shoes and boots."

She said a neighbour intentionally left a pair of old shoes

on her porch recently, just to see if the foxes would carry them away. Sure enough, the next morning they were gone.

"We've had foxes here for years, but this is the first time that shoe has been the most popular thing in the world," Lena said with a laugh. "It's just so funny."

On some evenings, neighbours have watched as the kit play in the quiet street or in backyards, tossing around the shoes they've found like prized toys.

Cal said the fox pups sometimes find tennis balls, too, "and play with them just like kids."

The game continues until the mother fox returns, carrying home their dinner clew in her mouth — often catching a fish, a bird, a squirrel, a fish that washed up on shore, or the remains of an unfortunate squirrel she caught.

"It's hilarious," Lena said. "They are the cutest little things and they have no fear of anyone. The whole neighbourhood is just killing themselves laughing."

She said a neighbour told

her she watched a pup trying to pull a shoe through a hole in a fence, trying to bring it back to its den nestled somewhere among the rocks on the lakeshore.

When the bones of past meals are added to the collection, neighbours speculate that the fox's den must look like "a cemetery slash shoe store."

"It's so funny," Lena said. "It's just so funny."

Residents have also started leaving shoes and boots they've found on their property prominently displayed by the roadside in the hope that the people who own them can reclaim them. Cal has placed two shoes at the end of his driveway, while several more odd boots and shoes lined the sidewalk in Wainfleet.

Erno Rossi, an outdoor enthusiast and author who lives in the neighbourhood, has been watching the foxes for years, often taking pictures of them and posting them on social media websites.

Rossi said the foxes started moving into the area about a decade ago, as the grow-



HANDOUT/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

A photograph by Erno Rossi of one of the neighbourhood foxes that are being blamed for stealing shoes.

ing coyote population in the wetlands of Wainfleet forced them to find a safer place to live.

"The foxes are not going to be around long, if they're competing with coyotes," he said.

The foxes have since adapted to the urban environment very well, and their numbers are growing. Lena said neighbours estimate that

at least three fox families currently live in the area, and have found a safer place to live.

"They're just prolific," he said. "There are lots of foxes."

Rossi said there seems to be plenty for the foxes to eat, especially on the roadside.

"They love dead stuff on the road, and prefer roadkill squirrels," he said.

Rossi smiled while speculating about the sudden inter-

est in old footwear.

"Why are the shoes outside? I assume it's because they smell," he said, with a laugh. "And what do they smell like? I suggest they smell like roadkill squirrel."

Rossi said he has some rank-smelling rubber boots himself. "But I bring them in at night because you can't trust these foxes."

While the presence of the foxes have kept residents entertained, Rossi said he has heard a few concerns among neighbours, too, particularly regarding rabies and the safety of pets.

But he said he has yet to see a fox infected with rabies locally, and the animals shouldn't pose a threat to most domestic animals, such as cats.

Rossi said his cat seems to have made friends with the wild foxes, playing together in the backyard or napping near one another in the shade.

"They sort of trust one another," he said.

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# Officials keep eye on rabies outbreak

**BILL SAWCHUK**  
Postmedia Network

We are surrounded in Niagara.

There is a virulent raccoon rabies outbreak to the west in the Hamilton, Stoney Creek area. To the east, New York State is "rife with raccoon rabies," Kevin Strooband, executive director of Lincoln County Humane Society, said.

So far, Niagara has been largely untouched. And officials mean to keep it that way.

"There have been two or three cases in the area, and they were both in West Lincoln," Strooband said. "It is very close. It will likely hit in Grimsby — if it hits."

The Ministry of Natural Resources is collecting dead raccoon samples from southern Ontario and is saturating an enormous area from Long Point to Port Colborne with a raccoon rabies vaccine.

The baits smell like vanilla and come in a wasp ampule. The ministry has stamped them, "Rabies Vaccine, Do

Not Eat."

No one is taking the outbreak lightly. Strooband said. Rabies is transferable to humans. If not treated, it is always fatal.

"Rabies is the epitome of the worst virus a person can get," Strooband said. "Once you have it, you will die. There is a critical point when it is in your system that it can't be treated. At that point, all they can do is try to make you comfortable."

Strooband said rabies and another virus, distemper, have similar symptoms, but distemper isn't transferable to humans.

"They have an unusually high number of sick raccoons in Grimsby this year, and those had distemper," he said. "It is almost as bad as last year."

We have to get about one car a day, or about 30 a month, that has sick raccoons. That number has doubled. Some of us, no doubt, are because people are vigilant about reporting."

The MNR was alerted in early December after an incident in Hamilton in which

two bullmastiffs fought a rabid raccoon in the back of Hamilton animal services van. Animal control officers rounded up the dogs after they were running loose in downtown Hamilton. The raccoon was already in the van and on the way to the city's animal shelter to be quarantined. The dogs contracted the disease and had to be quarantined.

Since then, the MNR has documented 108 cases of raccoon rabies in the area, which includes Hamilton, Niagara, Halton and Brampton.

"They have all been tightly clustered, which is a good thing," said Chris Davies, the manager of wildlife research and monitoring with the MNR. "Since the first of April we have distributed an additional 500,000 baits. The vast majority come from the air with fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. We have finished that component."

"What we are doing now is filling in the spots by hand in the slightly urban areas."

Davies said the ministry has a staff of 10 working in

the Hamilton area hand-baiting. That task will continue through June.

The ministry is also taking live-animal samples. Officials trap raccoons, draw blood samples and test them for rabies. The ministry uses the specimens to help measure the effectiveness of the vaccination campaign.

"At the end of August we will come back and do it all again," Davies said. "Right now there are young animals in the population and those young animals, up to 16 weeks old, do not react to the vaccine. The spring baiting is to get the adults."

Davies said there was only one real "wild card" in the program.

"This is the first large urban outbreak we have had," he said. "You can't fly everywhere. You can't get into the woods and set the baits where you need them from the air in an urban setting. There is a lot more hand-baiting in this campaign than we have ever done."

Davies said there was a similar raccoon rabies outbreak in Quebec in 2008. It took four



THE CANADIAN PRESS

A captured raccoon peers through the bars of a trap. Ontario is working to put up a vaccine net after rabies was detected in raccoons.

years to eliminate the virus.

"We have every reason to believe we can do the same thing here," he said. "We have 40 years of research on raccoon rabies in Ontario. Our stuff is based on really good science."

Davies said the strain in southern Ontario likely came across the border.

"We think it was a long-distance translocation from somewhere in the U.S.," he said. "It was probably on a truck or a train. That is how they get here."

Davies said the virus spreads rapidly once it gets

into the local population. Strooband recommended pet owners keep their animals inside or on a leash and make sure vaccinations are up to date. He asked residents to call the humane society if they see a sick raccoon, skunk, fox or coyote.

He also doesn't recommend touching, interacting or trying to relocate a wild animal. Anyone with a possible exposure from animal bites or scratches should seek medical attention and report the incident to public health.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Purr-fect performers

**LAURA BARTON**  
Postmedia Network

A Port Colborne charity is doing what it can to address the cat population problem in the city, including hosting an upcoming film festival that will showcase cat videos.

Proceeds from the "Feline film festival" will help the Port Colborne Feline Initiative fund a spaying and neutering program as well as vaccinations. Founded in June 2009 by Kristi Mallinson Vogel, has the goal of helping both cats and the communities they live in.

"We're a very small, all-volunteer, registered charity and we provide spay/neuter programs within the municipality of Port Colborne," she said.

Vogel said she started the

organization because she recognized a problem that communities were facing with the cat population.

The program is operated out of a donated home in Port Colborne. Volunteers work to humanely catch free-roaming cats which are then spayed or neutered and vaccinated before being released.

Handling the free-roaming cat population in this way, she said, has proven very effective because it helps keep cats healthy and the reproduction rates down.

Volunteer work is just one of many programs the organization has. Others include their spay/neuter assistance program, which helps low-income and financially struggling owners sterilize their animals, and also the KitKat foster program,

The foster program traps pregnant cats and allows them to give birth in a safe environment. Then the kittens get fostered out and eventually adopted out by the Welland and District Humane Society.

The charity hosts many different kinds of events to raise funds for the veterinary bills. That is where most of the money goes, Vogel said.

"We try and have a few different events throughout the year to appeal to different interests," she said.

One of the events is called Cat-nalls for Kitties. Vogel described it as a fun evening and while it's not the first time this event is being held, there is a new component to the list of activities this year.

Like past years, there will be a silent auction, cat merchan-

dise for sale and drinks and appetizers.

Vogel said she wanted to include the film festival after hearing about a friend of hers hosting one for her own organization.

The festival will have a compilation of cat videos submitted by the public. A total of 50 home and internet cat videos has been chosen and will be made into one film set to music.

The event will be emceed by Drew Hayes of 97.7 HTZ-FM and presented by Dave McManus's Dog Training Academy.

"We thought it was sort of fun that it was like 'We're going to the dogs,'" Vogel said about having a canine component to the night.

Catering will be done by



LAURA BARTON/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Kristi Mallinson Vogel, founder of the Port Colborne Feline Initiative, tries to get one of the camera-shy kittens to hold still for a photo in the organization's centre of operations.

The Smokin' Buddha restaurant in Port Colborne and the event will be cat-themed cocktails available to try.

Because of the alcohol, Vogel said the event isn't for young children.

The event takes place at the Rosedawn Centre Friday, June 3, at 7 p.m.

"We just want to appeal to

people to come out and have a good time and help us raise a little more cash for the kitty," Vogel said of the events host.

"Helping one cat can make a difference to the cat and to the neighbourhood."

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## Niagara Catholic forming its own sports league

WAYNE CAMPBELL  
Special to Postmedia Network

Starting this fall, football, basketball and volleyball teams at the eight Catholic high schools in Niagara will compete in a new league.

Niagara Catholic District School Board trustees Tuesday night endorsed the creation of the Niagara Catholic Athletic Association.

The high schools are now in the Niagara Regional High School Athletics Association (NRHSSA) along with those of Niagara District School Board, private, French and independent systems.

The Niagara regional association covers Zones 3 and 4 of the Southern Ontario Secondary School Association.

Physical education consultant Mike Sheahan said it would mean "we would withdraw from Zone 3 and Zone 4 league play for all team sports."

"At the end of league play, Niagara Catholic schools would return to their traditional Zones 3 and 4 to participate in SOSSA qualification games and events."

For individual athletic sports, such as cross country or track and field, "our request is to remain in the SOSSA and to participate fully with NRHSSA membership."

The move to a new association came as a result of frustrations over an inability of the Catholic high schools to influence decisions by the regional association. They were consistently outvoted on matters of constitution, scheduling, out of boundary qualifications and other issues, Sheahan said.

Philosophical differences came up with

disagreements over training styles and administrative sports procedures.

In some sports, for example, the Catholic schools would prefer evening games and other scheduling arrangements.

While Niagara Catholic representatives get along well with those in the regional association, he said, Niagara Catholic felt it did not have a significant voice in decision-making.

"By providing opportunities for input in the organization and constitutional structure, we are confident that decisions can be consistently monitored and appropriately revised to enhance and benefit our students' athletic experience," Sheahan said in his report.

Hamilton and Waterloo regions and London have seen similar sports splits by Catholic schools.

At the end of June, Niagara Catholic will meet its representatives in the four SOSSA zones to discuss arrangements. Zones 3 and 4 cover Niagara while Zones 1 and 2 serve Hamilton and area.

While the Niagara Catholic Athletic Association will begin with the region's eight Catholic high schools, its membership will remain flexible. Other schools within the region, such as independent or private high schools, are welcome to join, Sheahan said.

They would have to accept the new association's procedures and its "play like a champion" philosophy. It is a coaching system developed by University of Notre Dame to strengthen players' ethics as well as playing skills.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## 'Slightly warmer' summer expected

**RAY SPITERI**  
Postmedia Network

Niagara residents can expect a "comfortable" summer, says Weather Network meteorologist Nadine Powell.

The Weather Network launched its summer forecast Wednesday, looking at expected conditions during June, July and August.

For Niagara, Powell said temperatures will likely be slightly above seasonal, which is typically in the range of about 26°C.

"It seems as though, compared at least to the last couple of years, we may see at least one or two more days where we get to above 30°C, so it should be slightly warmer than the last couple of years."

Powell said they're not expecting to see a pattern of "really dry, scorched weather, where we may see people complaining for an extended period of time."

"I think it will be what most people will be used to in terms of a typical summer with only one or two days where we do see some hot conditions."

When it comes to precipitation, Powell said Niagara residents can "more than likely" expect to see near normal amounts of rain, which averages between 200 to 250 millimetres.

"Precipitation can be quite difficult to forecast because while you may have the entire season running more or less average, you get one extreme rainfall event, and that can really skew your balance," she said.

"But in general, it seems as though it may be near normal."

Powell said when meteorologists fore-

cast seasonal weather, they look at broad-scale atmospheric patterns.

"We're not seeing any one particular pattern that's taking hold for the summer months," she said.

"Some indicators are suggesting one scenario, other indicators are suggesting another scenario. Some of them are giving us conflicting indications of what sort of pattern we can expect. This is why we're not expecting to lock into a dominant pattern for the summer season."

"However, we are expecting that we should be slightly above, especially given that we're heading into a La Niña scenario right now."

Powell said Niagara's summer is expected to be comparable to most of what's west of southern Ontario will experience.

"The last couple of summers, we were slightly cooler than what we are experiencing right now," she said.

"For instance, Toronto last year we didn't get to 30°C until July. This year ... we've already hit 30°C for many areas across southern Ontario, but last year we took quite a while to get to that."

If temperatures do become unbearably warm this summer, Powell encourages people to take advantage of nearby waterways.

"The days where we do get above that 30°C, and it may be a bit difficult, if you can, get out to the water to stay cool. Take advantage of that lake breeze. And, of course, sun screen is always very important."

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Twitter: @RaySpiteri



School of Horticulture students Carmen Grey, front, and Rose Walters took advantage of the warm weather last week to do some weeding at the Niagara Parks Commission's Botanical Gardens in Niagara Falls to prepare for the busy summer tourism season. Temperatures have hovered around 30°C as The Weather Network forecasts a "slightly warmer" summer in Niagara than the last couple of years.



PHOTOS BY RAY SPITERI/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Falls resident Michalina Wiercinski and her five-month-old son, Jackson Davies, enjoyed the warm weather by visiting the Niagara Parks Commission's Botanical Gardens in Niagara Falls. The Weather Network is forecasting a "slightly warmer" summer in Niagara than the last couple of years.

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# PORT COLBORNE - WAINFLEET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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The Niagara Chamber Partnership (Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, West Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-On-The-Lake, Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Welland/Pelham and West Lincoln) represent in excess of 2,500 members, and have consistently carried out this long-standing role for as many as 125 years. These chartered Chambers represent specific geographic areas and each works towards the well-being of their respective business communities, all the while supporting each other for the broader good.

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Participating Chambers include Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Welland/Pelham, and West Lincoln. (Niagara-On-The-Lake participates at a rate of \$125)

## Congratulations to all President's Awards Recipients and Nominees!

Each year, the Chamber hosts our annual Awards Gala as a way to say "Thank You" to the outstanding businesses and citizens that make Port Colborne and Wainfleet great places to live and work. Although there is only one trophy per category, each and every nominee is a winner in our eyes! Thank you to all the nominees, guests, and sponsors that came together and made the 2016 President's Awards Gala an amazing event.

Congratulations to the recipients of the following awards:

Youth Citizen of the Year: Brandee Videcak

Citizen of the Year: Aubrey Foley

Women in Business: Mary-Beth Benner of Marshville Chocolates

New Business of the Year: Concessi's Long Beach Market & Diner

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If you know someone who deserves to be recognized, let us know! Contact us today to nominate them for the 2017 President's Awards! Call 905-834-9765.



## Mark your Calendars for our Upcoming Chamber Events...

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## Chamber Events

Thank you to our members for participating in our events! The Chamber is proud to provide our membership with a variety of opportunities to network, learn, and grow as business owners. Here's a look at some of our programming from the past few months....



Members had a chance to experience the world from Clarence Street, Port Colborne, when *Ten Thousand Villages* hosted the February BAS.



Deputy Mayor Bea Kenny took the mic at the March BAS, hosted by the City of Port Colborne at Roselawn Centre.



Mayors Wayne Redekop, Frank Campion, April Jeffs, Deputy Mayor Bea Kenny, Jim Diodati, and Dave Augustyn took centre stage for a conversation-style presentation at the Southern Tier Mayors Luncheon.



Our experienced panel of professionals discussed "Business Survival through Horizontal and Vertical Growth" and explained why companies need both to survive at the March Learning Forum.



Awards were handed out to outstanding business owners and citizens at the 2016 President's Awards Gala at the Italian Hall.



Mark Guilbeault and Associates hosted the May BAS at Community Living Port Colborne, where members mingled and made new connections.

# PORT COLBORNE - WAINFLEET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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The Reeb House welcomed members of the Chamber for the April Business After Five networking event, where new connections were made while enjoying the fun and friendly atmosphere of this local favourite venue.

Our April Learning Forum was hosted at Whisky Run Golf Club, where the pros discussed "The Most Effective Social Media Tools for your Business."

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### Niagara Chamber Partnership Hosted 3rd Annual "Building Niagara Together"

The Niagara Chamber Partnership (Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, West Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-On-The-Lake, Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Welland/Pelham and West Lincoln), Horizon Utilities and the Niagara Industrial Association, worked in partnership, with the Regional Chairs office, and the 12 municipalities to once again present the 3rd Annual "Building Niagara Together" – an event aimed at bringing together Niagara's municipal politicians to continue a collaborative discussion around Niagara's future. It was held on May 11th.

While opportunities exist for municipal politicians to meet with colleagues from across the province and the country, there is no structured opportunity for local politicians to meet with each other here in Niagara. Exchanging ideas, making connections and discussing the issues that are important to the taxpayers across Niagara are some of the things event organizers hope will continue beyond this event.

This year the Hon. Ted McMeekin, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was the keynote speaker. Some of the issues that Minister McMeekin addressed included: Affordable Housing, Municipal Legislative Reform, OMB Reform, and Greenbelt and Coordinated Review.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Family grieving after dogs poisoned

SARAH FERGUSON  
Postmedia Network

The suspicious deaths of two Pyrenees mountain dogs have left a huge hole that can never be filled in the hearts of a Fort Erie family.

Megan Sunners was visiting a friend a few hours away from home on May 18 when she received a call from her mother, Martha Skerrett.

"My mom said both dogs were very sick and they were lethargic," Sunners said.

"At first we thought it may have been a tick bite. Never in our wildest dreams did we think something like this would happen."

Seven-year-old Shasta, who was adopted from a farm as a puppy, couldn't walk. The 135-pound dog was lifted using a bed sheet and placed into a car.

Thor, a six-year-old 170-pound dog, was losing his balance but he managed to walk to another waiting car and lied inside.

Both dogs were driven to the Niagara Veterinary Emergency Clinic in Thorold.

Took up to drive, Sunners left her friend's home at the next morning and drove straight to the animal hospital.

"Shasta had really bad seizures and pain. She died at 2 a.m. that morning."

When Sunners greeted Thor, he was "happy" to see her.

"Thor had an IV placed in him. He kept collapsing when he stood up. We so excited to see me. He licked me and kissed me," Sunners said.

"He was sort of acting like himself so I thought he would be OK."

Despite the best efforts of staff at the animal hospital, Thor could not be saved and died a few hours after Shasta.

"Thor's mouth had no moisture, he had respiratory problems and most of his organs were failing," Sunners said.

"The vet told us he had no chance to live. I made the decision to euthanize him. I didn't want him to suffer anymore."

Sunners spent her last moments with Thor beside him.

"I laid down with him and pet him. I told him it was a good boy. He went with no pain."

"Shasta and Thor's dogs were deliberately and maliciously poisoned" on their Mathews Road property.

The veterinarian that cared for Shasta and Thor "found evidence of poison after testing both dogs."

"When we came home we called the police and two detectives were sent out. They took our statements and collected evidence," Sunners said.

The dogs called a 1,500 square-foot

enclosure, surrounded by trees, home during the day.

"They were not indoor dogs but they came inside the house every night so they didn't make noise."

Sunners said detectives discovered dried blood on the dogs' pen. Sunners said the large size of the dogs is an indication that their deaths were caused intentionally.

"(Shasta and Thor) would have had to ingest a significant amount to be poisoned like they were," she said. "We were told the poison had to have been ingested at least 72 to 24 hours before they started showing any signs."

Sunners was told there was nothing she could have done to save the dogs' lives.

"We would have had to discover it (the poison) within one to three hours (of it being ingested in the dogs) to have any chance of saving them."

Sunners said she and her family are trying their best to heal from the pain caused by the loss of their dogs. Knowing what happened to their beloved pets, Sunners said she "doesn't feel safe on [her] street."

"It would help our family to know that people care and if they know anything to please call the police. We really want to find out who did this," she said.

"Both of these dogs did not have a mean bone in their bodies. They were more than just family pets. Without them, we would really quiet down."

Sunners said her family has created a Go Fund Me Page with all of the proceeds to be donated to Welland and District Humane Society from where Thor was adopted. The page can be found at [www.gofundme.com/4shasta-thor](http://www.gofundme.com/4shasta-thor).

"We wanted to do something and this is one way to show we are against animal cruelty," Sunners said.

Niagara Regional Police Const. Leslie Sardella said police are "still actively investigating the incident."

She said police are aware of two other incidents in the past year where poisonings have occurred. Neither of those incidents were confirmed to be caused as a result of poison.

"Given only two reported incidents in the past year I would say that it is not common," she said.

Sardella said it is important for anyone with information about this incident to call police, or make an anonymous phone call to Crime Stoppers.

"As with solving any criminal investigation, evidence must exist to charge someone with a criminal offence. Tips from witnesses or video evidence greatly assist the police in solving a crime," she said. "Suspicion alone is not enough to constitute a criminal charge."

Wendy Trombley, Fort Erie SPCA

manager, said the NRP were called first and proceeded with the investigation.

"We are available for any animal need," she said.

The incident is "not completely solved" but Sunners stressed it's "always important to keep your pet's safety in mind."

Anyone with information is asked to call the police at 905-871-2300 ext. 232 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477.

[sferguson@postmedia.com](mailto:sferguson@postmedia.com)

**What to do if you suspect your pet has ingested poison**

- Remove your pet from the area.
- Check to make sure your pet is safe, breathing and acting normally.
- Don't give any home antidotes.
- Don't induce vomiting without consulting a vet or Pet Poison Helpline.
- Call Pet Poison Helpline at 800-213-6680.
- If veterinary attention is necessary, contact your veterinarian or emergency veterinary clinic immediately.
- **Pet Poison Helpline**
- The Pet Poison Helpline offers resources and information about toxins such as plants an other items that can harm family pets.
- For more information visit [www.petpoisonhelpline.com](http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com).

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# And the worst roads are ...

ANDREA TINGEY

Postmedia Network

Drivers are leaving no doubt about how much they dislike Queenston Street.

The St. Catharines roadway was overwhelmingly rated the worst street in Niagara in this year's CAA's Worst Roads campaign.

Thirteen per cent of Niagara voters opted for Queenston, more than double the number of voters for the second-worst street, Fort Erie's Donkin Road.

Queenston also achieved the dubious honour of ranking fifth among the worst roads in all of Ontario.

Mike DiPalo, associate director of transportation engineering for Niagara Region, said the Worst Roads list is helpful when planning for road construction.

"I think this CAA Worst Roads list is just another example of some useful information that we use to prioritize our projects," he said.

"It's definitely beneficial."

Other streets that made

Niagara's list included Niagara Falls' Drummond Road, which came in third, and Welland's Niagara Street, which came ninth.

Canadians were able to vote for four weeks during the campaign, which ended April 29.

Categories included cycling, road safety, pedestrian safety and poor signage. The majority of Niagara roads chosen were selected due to poor conditions, including potholes and crumbling pavement. The second-most cited reason was pedestrian safety.

Last year, Fort Erie's Donkin Road topped Niagara's list and also came in No. 9 among Ontario's worst roads. Many of the roads that made this year's list are controlled by a mix of regional and city departments, including McLeod Road in Niagara Falls, which ended up in seventh place, and Niagara-on-the-Lake's Lakeshore Road, securing No. 4.

DiPalo said the Region is addressing the condition of



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Potholes and uneven pavement on Niagara Street in Welland earned it the No. 9 spot on the list of Niagara's worst roads.

those streets.

For Donkin Road, it is in the planning stages and reconstruction is hoped to begin in 2017 or 2018.

There are two projects to be implemented on Donkin. From Burleigh Road to Buffalo Road, the Region is implementing a proposal to reconstruct the road, a plan it believes will take two years'

work and will likely start in 2017. As well, the Region is designing a roundabout at Lakeshore Road and Dominion Road, which currently is in a Y shape, and hopes construction will begin in the next couple of years.

St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik said drivers will be able to see repairs happening as early as this summer

## Niagara's Top 10 Worst Roads

1. Queenston Street, St. Catharines
2. Dominion Road, Fort Erie
3. Drummond Road, Niagara Falls
4. Lakeshore Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake
5. Grantham Avenue, St. Catharines
6. Ontario Street, St. Catharines
7. McLeod Road, Niagara Falls
8. Dorchester Road, Niagara Falls
9. Niagara Street, Welland
10. St. David's Road, Thorold

## Ontario's Top 10 Worst Roads

1. County Road 49, Prince Edward County
2. Algoma Boulevard West, Timmins
3. Balmoral Street, Thunder Bay
4. Algoma Boulevard, East, Timmins
5. Queenston Street, St. Catharines
6. 19th Street, Hamilton
7. Lorne Street, Sudbury
8. Bayview Avenue, Toronto
9. Dufferin Street, Toronto
10. Riverside Drive, Timmins, and Water Street, Thunder Bay

on Grantham Avenue and Ontario Street.

"The CAA Worst Roads campaign provides us feedback from drivers about what roads need to be fixed," said Sendzik. "I'm happy to say that all roads on the list are scheduled for repair in the near future."

CAA spokesperson Alex Pedersen noted there was greater interaction this year throughout Canada. More

than 56,000 people participated, including 2,000 in Niagara.

"Our voting was up over 50 per cent so it was amazing for us, the response that we got this year," she said.

New additions to this year's list included Grantham Avenue in St. Catharines and St. David's Road in Thorold. The number of roads identified as needing help in Niagara rose to 373, from last year's 200.

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Bob Gale

## Cop board drafts Uber laws

**BILL SAWCHUK**  
Postmedia Network

The Niagara Regional Police services board has a plan for dealing with ride-hailing services such as Uber — but the public won't know the details for weeks.

"It is still in draft form," Bob Gale, the police board chairman, said Thursday. "Our solicitor will be meeting with representatives from the taxi industry and TNCs (transportation network companies) to go over it with them and get their input."

"We have come up with regulations that we feel fit Niagara and put safety first."

Gale said it would be wrong to release the plan to the public and then make changes.

"Our goal is to have it all in place by July 1," he said.

The board's solicitor will report back to the board for its licensing committee meeting June 9. The full board would finalize and enact the new bylaw at its June 23 meeting to meet a self-imposed July 1 deadline.

Gale said while the draft bylaw is finished, the board would still consider changing it.

"We don't want to get boxed into a corner where we could be wrong on something," he said.

Gale said the board is also waiting on Queen's Park to see if the provincial legislature is going to approve TNC-specific motor vehicle insurance provisions.

"Number 1 for us is safety," Gale said. "Insurance alone won't make it safe. There are other items such as record checks that we have also looked into."

"We know we are not going to make everybody happy. This whole thing is a mess right across North America. There is nothing uniform about it."

Under regulations currently in place, ride-hailing services are illegal in Niagara, although they have been operating.

Back in April, Niagara Regional Police charged 20 drivers from Uber with offences under the provincial Highway Traffic Act that prohibits picking up passengers for compensation without a permit offence.

Police also noted other problems with Uber drivers at the time. One of the drivers is charged with a criminal offence. Another was not the advertised Uber driver of record. One of the vehicles was not registered. Three of the drivers were from outside Niagara and "did not know the area."

Uber began operating in Niagara in November.

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# Walker recalled as generous community leader

PENNY COLES  
Postmedia Network

John Walker, one of Niagara's most distinguished entrepreneurs and generous philanthropists, died at his home Thursday surrounded by his family.

As the fourth-generation co-owner of Walker Industries with his brother Norris, he was known in the region for his generosity in many areas, both through the family business and personally.

While health care and the arts were often the beneficiaries of his public altruism, those who knew him say his giving was never about recognition, and he was quick to give away his credit.

Jackie Phelan, his personal assistant for more than 20 years, said Walker's philanthropy was a family legacy, something he learned from his parents John and Nora - a legacy that will continue with the next generation.

But it also came from the deep caring within that he had for other people.

"He had a boundless capacity to care for everyone he touched," she said.

And he touched a lot of people, "more than we'll ever know."

If he heard someone had a problem, he wanted to help, she said.

"His heart was open, and he listened. He heard what people were saying, and if he could do something about it he would."

His faith was important to him, she said, as was his business but family was his first priority.

He developed Niagara Waste Systems as a solution for the rehabilitation of the worked-out area of the quarry on the border of Thorold and Niagara Falls, and in the case of the Vinesland Quarries, an award-winning vineyard.

He had a clear vision, said Phelan, of taking the empty quarries and doing something positive with them.

And when he tackled something, she said, "he thought big, and he taught me to think big. He wanted experiences to be memorable, and he wanted to create big memories, but he never forgot the little details."

She points to the Touch-a-Truck events he sponsored at Niagara College. He and his wife, Carol, had seen similar events similar ones, much smaller scale, with emergency vehicles for kids to see up close, when they were visiting their grandchildren in the U.S.

The event, held every other year, not only brings together emergency vehicles but includes a variety of high Walker Industries construction machines, dump trucks and more, raising money for children's literacy projects.

But just as important to John, said Phelan, was creating memories for the little boy who was going to have the opportunity to sit in one of those construction vehicles.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, where John and Carol lived, they were well-known and highly regarded for their support of the Shaw Festival.

Bill Plunche, retired now, was director of resource development for the Shaw during the years when it had an aggressive capital campaign to build the new production centre and also build up an endowment fund.

"He was a tremendous ally during those years. He thought like a philanthropist, and he would sit quietly and listen, and then he would offer his advice. Apart from his own generosity, it was his advice that he could offer, because he was a philanthropist at heart, that I'll be eternally grateful for."

Plunche said the Walkers were in the fundraising field for 35 years, and met a lot of good people, "but with John, you knew he was giving from his heart. He talked a lot about growing up with philanthropy, and the importance of giving back to your community. To him it wasn't just about money, it was a way of living and thinking of others."

ers. There was always a thoughtful-ness to his giving, and he was a great resource for advice."

He was also a major sponsor of the popular Shaw Festival Film Series, which brings critically acclaimed films and documentaries to the Festival Theatre during the winter.

When the idea was first conceived, with Carol at the helm, there was no money for a projection system, John, says Plunche, offered to lend the money to purchase it.

"I'm sure he never expected to get it back, but we were able to return it. And he promptly gave it back to us," said Plunche.

"I was very fond of him. He'll be missed."

There were many other beneficiaries of his generosity, both in time and financial donations.

He received dozens of entrepreneurial and achievement awards, including a lifetime achievement award, member of several boards including the Shaw Festival, Shaver Hospital, Knox Presbyterian Church, Ridley College, AIDS Niagara, the YMCA, the Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre

Foundation and was honorary chair of the St. Catharines General Hospital Foundation's Breakthrough Health Care campaign.

He was also an Executive in Residence at Brock University, where in 2001, he was bestowed with a honorary doctorate. He was the honorary co-chair of the 10th Tri-annual campaign for the new St. Catharines hospital, which raised more than \$40 million, and was a member of the Niagara-on-the-Lake arm of the fundraising committee that successfully met its target of \$2.8 million.

But perhaps the gift he and his family will be best remembered for was the donation of \$5 million toward the construction of the Niagara Regional Cancer Centre at the hospital in St. Catharines. It was the largest private donation ever made by a family and was given by the Walker family and Walker Industries, under the leadership of John and Norris.

"John Walker was an exemplary leader, and his decades of service to health care helped to build a stronger Niagara. His generosity

and vision will continue to have an impact long into the future," said NHC's One Foundation board chairman Joe Maggio.

Local businessman Archie Katzman was co-chairman with Walker of the Niagara North branch of the campaign, and Katzman says he considered Walker a mentor and a friend.

"He was everything you could want in a friend," said Katzman.

"He was a real gentleman all the way through. With John, a handshake was always enough. He was just a great guy, and it was a real honour for me to be co-chair with him."

John was the husband of Carol Walker and father of David, Wendy, Ian and Geordie and stepfather to Carol and Rachel, and leaves also his former wife Peggy. He is survived by his wife Carol, his son David, his brother Norris (into Marilyn) and the late David E. Walker.

The family asked that memorial donations be made to the Niagara Historical Society, 43 Castlereagh St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, L0S 1J0.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## The Hip will always be special to Niagara

The bombshell came in the second paragraph of the Tragically Hip's message to fans: Gord Downie. Brain cancer. Terminal. Brain cancer. Terminal.

The surprise came in the fourth and fifth paragraphs: Another tour.

Once it all sunk in on a sad, strange Tuesday morning, the reality hit: After being around so long that we took them for granted, this would be our final chance to ever see the Hip.

So when tour dates were announced Wednesday, you could hear the groans of disappointment across the country. Just 11 shows in 10 cities. No Montreal. Nothing in the east coast. Nothing in the U.S.

And no Niagara date.

At first, they felt jilted. How could they forget about us? The Hip, a band strong local history, and a huge fan base in Buffalo. A Niagara show seemed automatic.

Buffalo News music writer Jeff Miers even penned a passionate column asking the band to play its "second home" one more time. It was titled "A humble request from Buffalo to Gord Downie and the Hip."

I heard of some online whining, people questioning why they're playing some



JOHN  
LAW

cities and not others. Why they're playing Toronto twice. Why they're doing this and not that.

The shame hits soon after. We have no right to ask anything of the Hip right now. Or ever again.

Most families – and the Tragically Hip surely feel like a family, after 30 years would deal with a terminal illness privately. No one would blame Downie if he disappeared to spend every last remaining second with his wife Laura and their four kids. I know if I received his death sentence, my first thought wouldn't be, "I should get back work."

His incurable cancer, called glioblastoma, was detected after he collapsed while cycling in his hometown of Kingston last year. He went through surgery and six weeks of chemotherapy. He has responded well to treatment, but Downie's doctor didn't sugarcoat it during a press conference Tuesday.



MATT DAY/POSTMEDIA FILES

Gord Downie performing with The Tragically Hip in Niagara-on-the-Lake, 2012.

The outcome is inevitable. Gord Downie will die from this.

For him to tour, for him to go through the physical torture of performing, is incredible. And keep in mind, the tour doesn't start until July 22. That's two months for an aggressive cancer to do more damage. I have my doubts it will even happen. Cancer has a way of ruining a good story.

But if it does, it will be one of the more fascinating final chapters in rock history. This won't be one of those "farewell tour" con jobs we've fallen for so many times. I

still recall my high school classmates feverishly trying to get tickets to the Who in 1982 after they announced it was the last tour. Seven years later they were back.

That won't be the case with the Hip. It doesn't get more final than this. Can you ever recall seeing a band while knowing, for a fact, one of the members was going to die soon?

And before you answer "Rolling Stones," keep in mind they've been saying that about Keith Richards since the '70s.

Imagine seeing Nirvana

in 1984, Led Zeppelin in 1986, heck, even Prince just a few months ago ... with the knowledge this was the last time ever.

The Hip wants this tour to be a celebration, no doubt, but it's inevitable it will also feel like a funeral. An emotional parting. There will be tears at every show, none more than in Kingston on Aug. 20, the final concert where it all began.

Of course, we wanted Niagara to be part of this. They're as loved here as they are anywhere in Canada. Just one more time. One more

singalong to Courage. One more encore of Grace, Too. Or Three Pistols. Or Ahead By a Century. Just one more night with a national treasure.

But maybe this isn't about what we want, but what we had. So many memorable shows in Niagara-on-the-Lake and Buffalo. In St. Catharines in the late 1980s and early '90s. Right up to their last Niagara show at the Meridian Centre in February last year. About 6,000 of us were there that night. No one thought it would be for the last time. The Hip will return, we said. They always do.

Until they don't.

Life is like that. We rarely ever know when something is going to be for the last time. Your last day at work. Your last drive home. Your last conversation with a friend. The Hip owe us nothing, and something pretty amazing. A chance for artist and fan to say goodbye.

Niagara won't be part of the last tour, but we're close enough – one show in Hamilton and two in Toronto. So don't fret they aren't coming back one last time. Celebrate their many Niagara visits, looking for a place to happen.

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